

Actress Advocate

Mary Tyler Moore parlays her 40-year struggle with diabetes into one of her most important roles.

By JUDY ALEXANDRA DIEDWARDO

Throughout most of the 1970s, a pretty brunette tossed a beret triumphantly into the air and beamed her thousand-watt smile into living rooms across the country. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* featured an independent, young working woman, Mary Richards, who refused to let anything or anyone get her down. “You’re gonna make it after all,” went the theme song.

But around the time the TV show launched, Moore, then in her early 30s, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. She lived in denial for years. “Making it” was anything but a certainty. Overcoming the anger, denial and fear was a process, not an event, Moore explains.

“Learning how to load a syringe with insulin and inject it into my own flesh? What if I inject an air bubble into an artery? Charts, graphs, journaling, urine testing? Boy was I scared,” she recounts in her new memoir, *Life, Loves, and Oh Yeah, Diabetes*, published by St. Martin’s Press.

The Emmy award-winning co-star of the early 1960s’ *Dick Van Dyke Show* and new star of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* agonized over going public about her disease. “Once I realized that I was too concerned with the ifs and maybes of how my personal history would be received, I called on my own common sense and realized it was an opportunity to help an enormous number of people. That’s what drives me to do absolutely whatever it takes to help find a cure,” she tells *SUCCESS*.

Moore was no stranger to working hard for what she believed in. She and second husband Grant Tinker founded the television production company MTM Enterprises in 1970. Moore was involved in the creation and production of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, and their company later produced *The Bob Newhart Show*, *Hill Street Blues*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, *Remington Steele* and other popular sitcoms and dramas.

After the last episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* aired in 1977, she continued to work in television, earning a total of six Emmy Awards and four People’s Choice Awards over the years. She also received three Golden Globes for her work in TV and



film and an Academy Award nomination for best actress in the 1980s movie *Ordinary People*. She was given a Tony Award for her work on Broadway.

Today, Moore uses her fame, passion and personal experience to bring awareness and raise research funding for type 1 diabetes. As the international chairman of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation for 25 years, she is donating proceeds from her book sales to JDRF-funded research.

Moore also has testified before Congress with groups of diabetic children about the need for increased federal funding for diabetes research. Joining her last spring were singer and songwriter Nick Jonas of the Jonas Brothers, boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard, as well as children and teens who are members of the JDRF’s Children’s Congress.

“I have great fondness and respect for these kids who, at a very early age, have critical responsibility for handling insulin,” Moore says. “Because of the enormous responsibility, diabetic kids tend to grow up to be the most mature, most realistic people who have a natural desire to reach outside of themselves.”

Moore’s own journey to acceptance of diabetes was difficult. Upon being released from the hospital after her diagnosis, she discovered her then-husband Grant Tinker and her housekeeper had rid the house of all sweets. “I was so angry, I felt so cheated, I got in my car, drove to the market and bought a dozen glazed donuts, which I ate while driving back home. Infuriated

over my life sentence, I lashed out,” she says. Ultimately, she realized, “there’s no denying the realities of diabetes. I should know!”

Type 1 diabetes—also called juvenile diabetes because it’s more commonly diagnosed in children—is an autoimmune disease that results in the pancreas’s failure to produce insulin that enables the body to derive energy or glucose from food. As compared with type 2 diabetes, a metabolic disease that can be managed with exercise, diet and medications, type 1 diabetes sufferers are dependent on injected or pumped insulin for life. Insulin is not a cure, however, and it doesn’t prevent complications such as kidney failure, blindness, heart disease, stroke and amputation.

“You have to accept this disease and adopt the necessary disciplines,” Moore says. “Otherwise, it will start nibbling away at your very being with things like blindness, amputations, and the like. If you

don’t control diabetes it will control you.”

Although she has not escaped the ravages of diabetes, she maintains a sense of humor and perspective about her condition. “My peripheral vision has been severely limited because of my diabetes, which means I can see just fine looking straight ahead. But if I am at a function with lots of people, I am constantly bumping into people—even kicking them! I have to maintain a sense of humor about the whole thing or else I would never go out.”

Moore manages her diabetes through moderation with food, sleep, exercise and stress along with meticulous charting and monitoring of her blood sugar. She lives in Connecticut with her cardiologist husband of more than 25 years, Dr. Robert Levine, as well as several pet dogs. She stays fit doing Pilates and cardio three to four times a week, which allows her to indulge in her occasional penchant for mocha cake.

“I assure you that I do *not* have any diabetic mocha cake around the house,” she laughs. “But as long as I am sticking to my chart, I can adjust for it if I choose.”



Denny Henry/EPA/Corbis



Famous Face

Today, Moore uses her fame to raise funds and awareness for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. Above, speaking for JDRF at the National Press Club.

Making a Difference

Going Public

Moore was starring in her own television series through the '70s when she decided to go public with her diabetes diagnosis. Today, she is a vocal advocate for JDRF.



CBS Photo Archive/Getty Images



Astrid Stawiarz/Getty Images

Since she was diagnosed with the disease, Moore has seen many advances. One of the most promising through JDRF research has been development of an artificial pancreas, a device that's worn like an insulin pump, which also monitors and delivers insulin on demand to the wearer. "We're three-quarters of the way there," says Moore, who is confident she will see a cure in her lifetime. "I believe it will happen and every day we are one step closer, thanks

to the research being done."

In the meantime, she continues to push forward, lobby Congress, "put a face to a disease that impacts 3 million Americans," as she told a Senate committee.

From birth we have no guarantee about anything, Moore concludes. "When I speak to those who are newly diagnosed, I encourage them to work *with* what they have—not against those things. Too, you have to give up in order to find acceptance," she says. "Moreover, you truly have to make the very best of what you've got. We all do." **S**